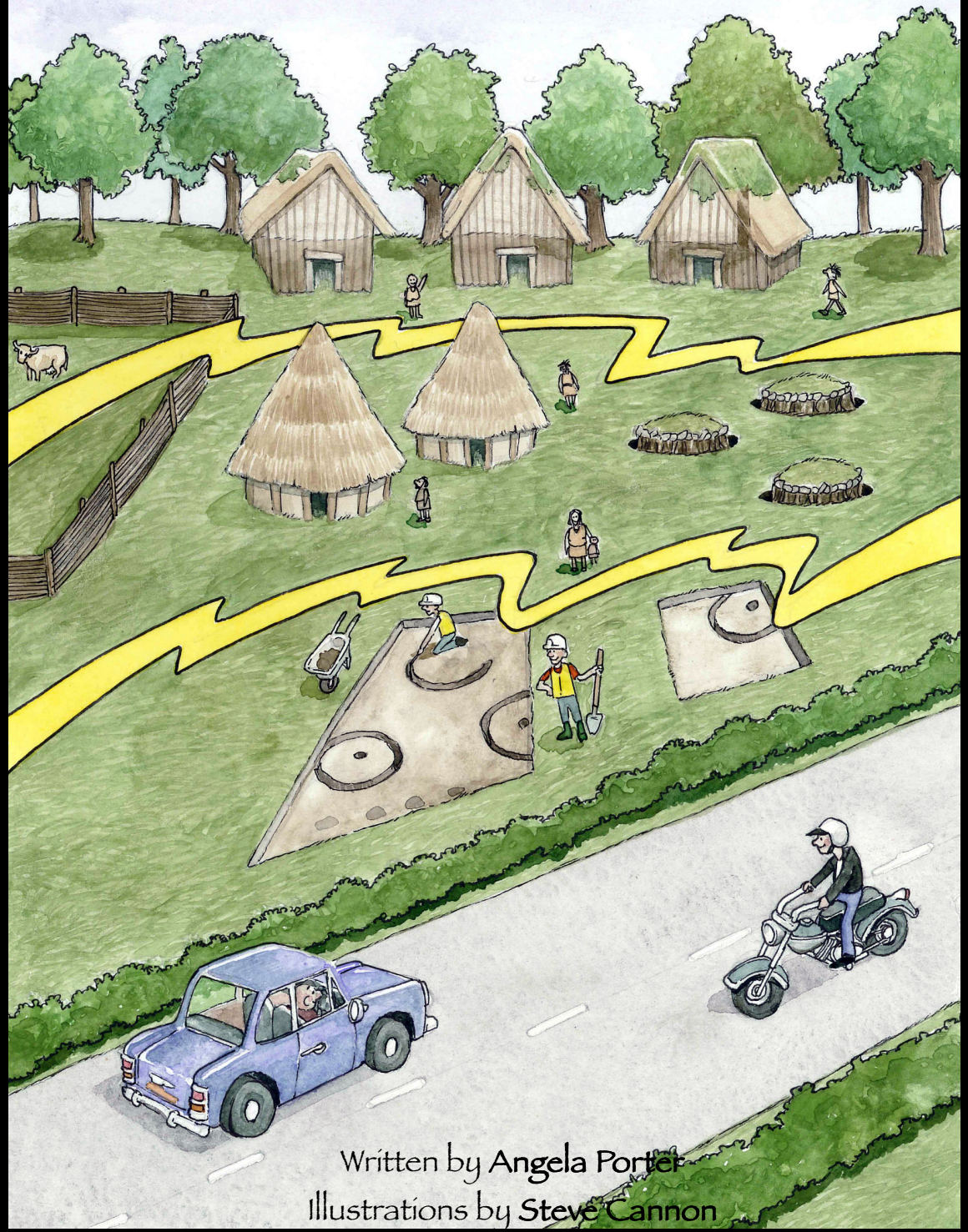


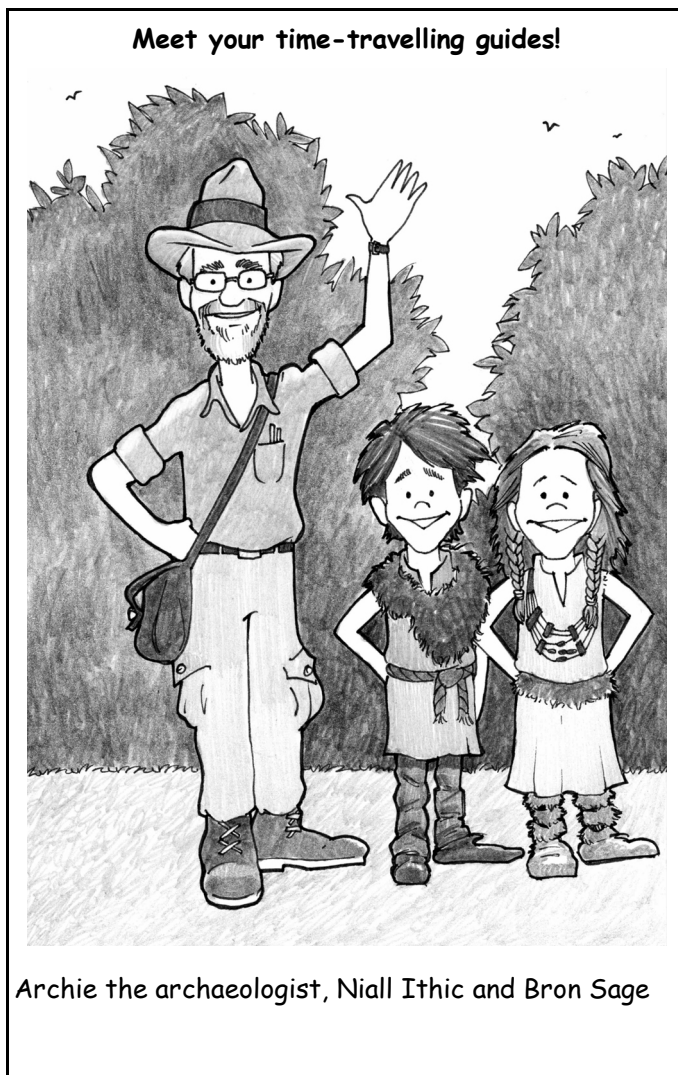
Digging Down



Written by Angela Porter
Illustrations by Steve Cannon

Digging Down

Angela Porter



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I'd also like to thank Ian Kilcoyne, Jeanne Evans, Rob, Fitz, Ceri and many others at St Cenydd School, Caerphilly, Wales, who read the first draft manuscript, and have supported my professional development in the form of the writing of this little book. I also thank my pupils who have commented on artwork and put up with me waxing lyrical, perhaps too often, about the archaeology found while 'digging down'!

It's been an absolutely fascinating and fantastic experience for me and I hope that everyone who reads this book will get as much enjoyment and 'well, I never!' and 'wow!' moments out of it as I have in the reading, learning, researching, understanding and writing about it all.

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Time Travellers – Get ready to depart!



In 2004, some amazing discoveries were made in Northern Ireland in the UK. A new road was being built - the A1 between Belfast and Dublin. You are going to travel back in time to Ballintaggart and Derrycraw in the **Neolithic** and the **Bronze Age**.

These people didn't leave us any written records of their lives. However, they did leave **evidence** of themselves in the very Earth itself - the traces of their buildings and the **artefacts** they left behind. This is called **archaeology**.

Archaeologists excavated (very carefully dug up) these sites to find this evidence. They, and other experts, used this evidence to work out the 'story' of the lives of these long ago people.

The photos show the completed 'digs' at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw. You can see some of the traces left by the Neolithic and Bronze Age peoples who once used this land.

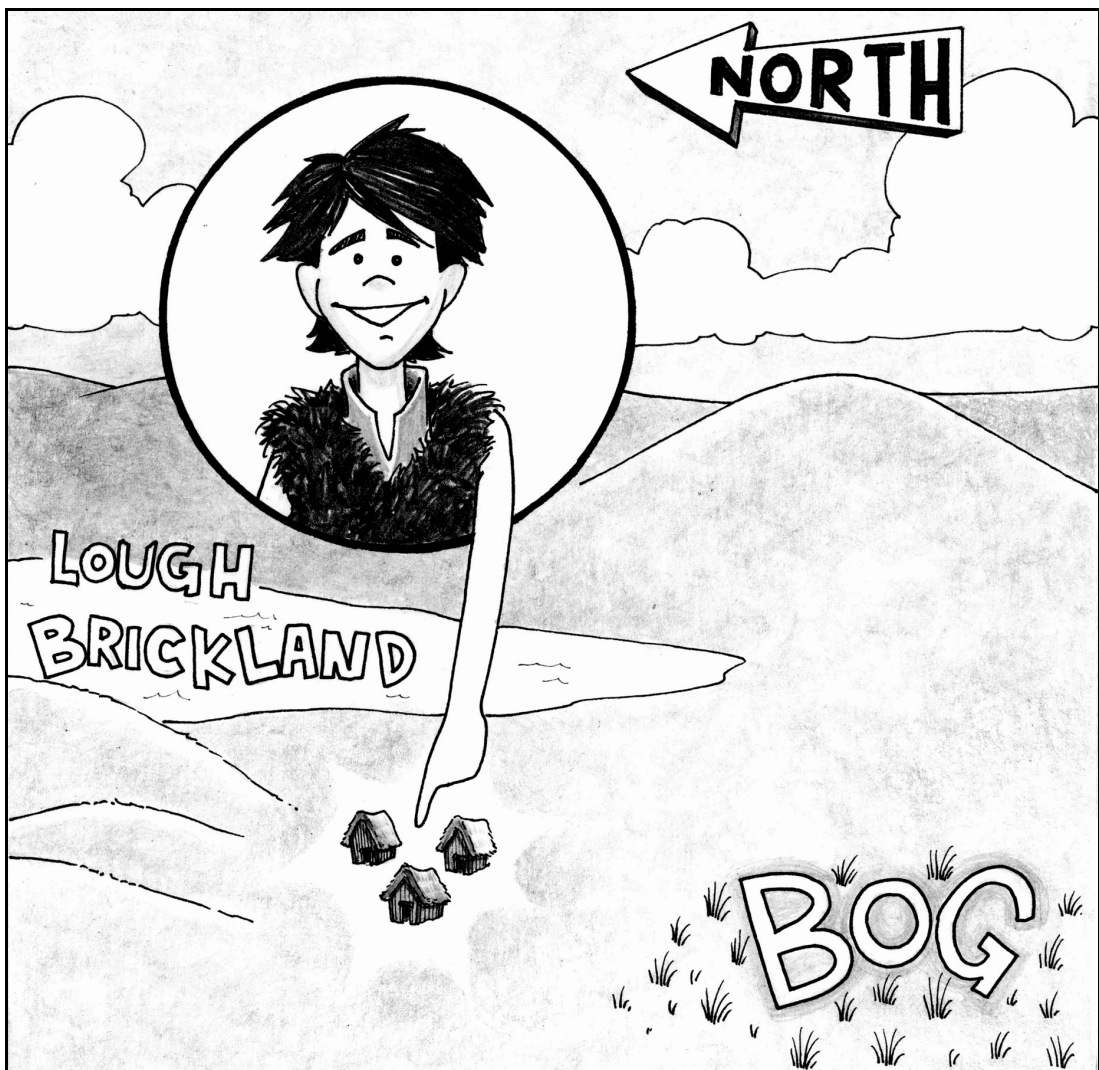


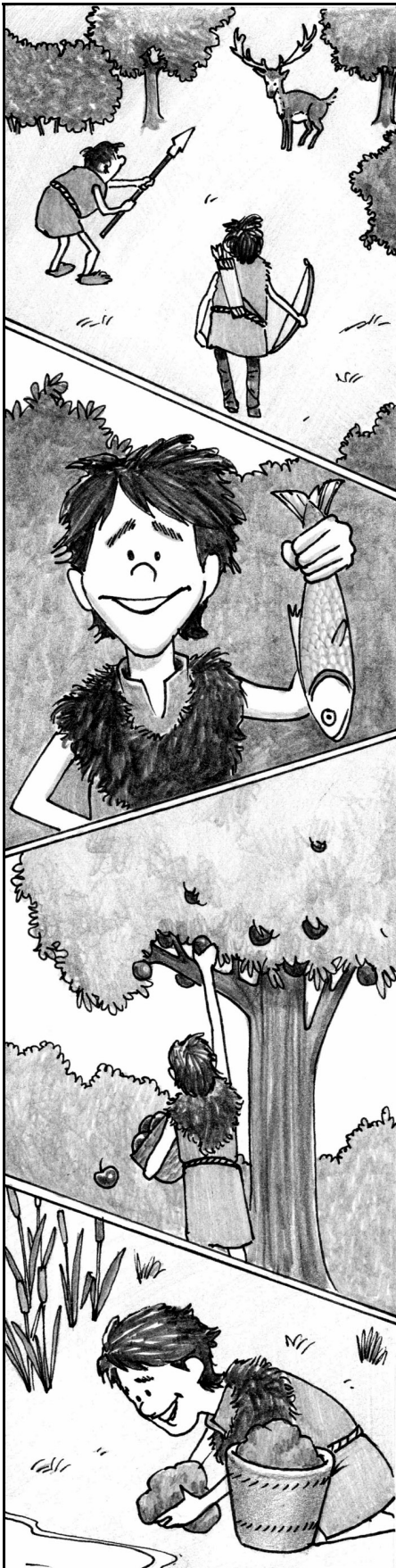
Welcome to the Neolithic!

Welcome to the early part of **Neolithic** Age. You've travelled back to around 5600 years ago (**y.a.**), give or take a couple of hundred years.

The word Neolithic means 'new stone age' and this age started when people became farmers as well as hunter-gatherers. They built houses to live in. They cleared the land so they could grow crops and raise the earliest farm animals. But, they continued to hunt and gather food to add to what they grew. In Britain, the Neolithic started around 6000 y.a. and ended when the first bronze tools were made, around 4000 y.a.

Now that you're in the Neolithic you have some important jobs to do. You have to build your own home. And feed yourself. And make everything else you need. To do all of this you need some land, and I've the perfect piece of land for you!





This is such a good place to live.

The hills to the north-west will shelter us from the worst of the westerly winds and rain.

Drier land rises between the two lakes. Drier land means we won't get our feet wet! Also, in the Neolithic we liked to live on land that had water nearby.

People and animals can only approach us along the narrow **inch** of land - that helps protect us.

The fertile soil on the south-facing slope means this is a fantastic place for farming. It's perfect for growing wheat, oats and barley!

The lakes give us lots of different plants, animals and materials to use :-

- Fishing fan? There are two lakes, jumping with fish, perfect!
- Happy hunter? Lots of tasty water birds and other animals live around the lake.
- **Thatcher** of roofs? Well, loads of reeds can be found around the waters edge so you can put a waterproof roof on your home.

There are also wonderful woods full of trees so you can pick your own fruit and nuts! There's hazel nuts from hazel trees, crab apples, sloe-berries from blackthorn trees, and acorns from oak trees.

There is even more happy hunting to be had in the woods - pig, birds, deer, bear and other animals can be found here.

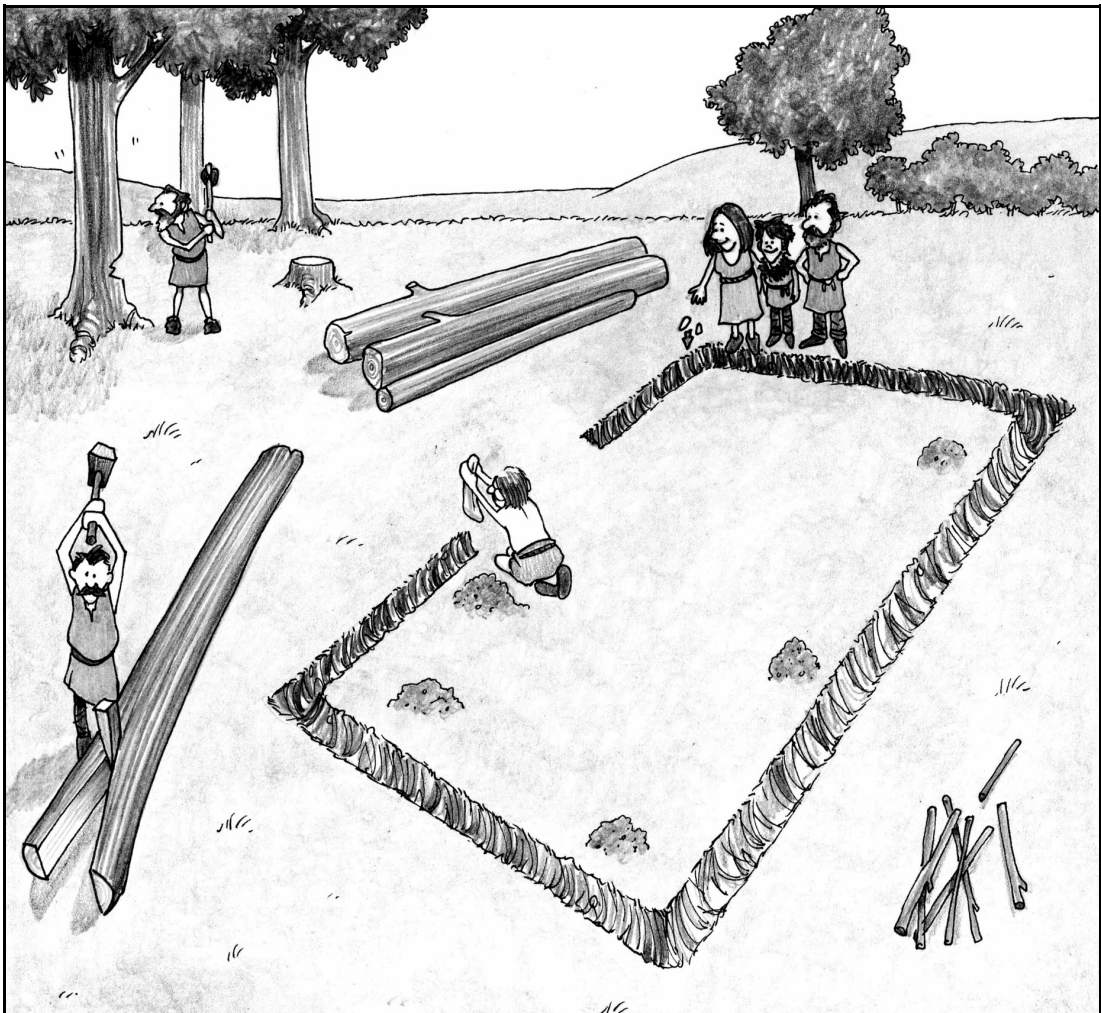
Also, don't forget you'll need loads of willow and alder for basket weaving, oak for building, wood (or even dried animal dung) for burning, and yew or hazel or another strong wood for making tools, arrows, bows and spears.

Potty about pottery? There are sources of good clay nearby, so you can potter away all day if you like, and make all the pots you could ever need.

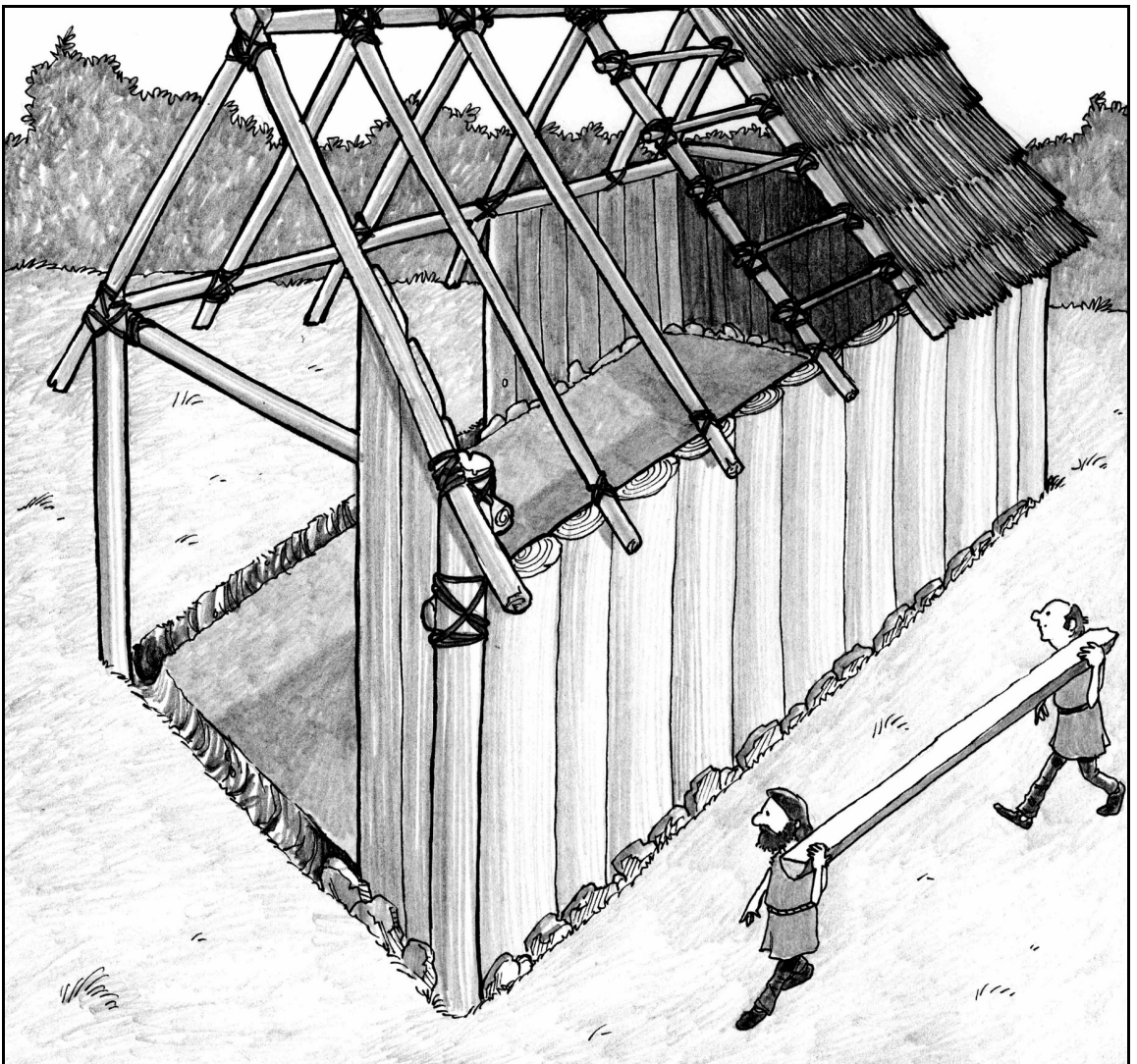
Home, sweet home!

Now, you've got your land so you can find and grow food so you won't starve. Next, you need somewhere to live. In the Neolithic, you had to build your own home.

- 1 Get digging! You need to dig trenches for the walls. For lots of warmth from the Sun be sure to have the longest side facing south. You need to dig holes for the posts to support the walls and roof. Your tools are an **antler** pick to break the ground and a shoulder blade of a cow or other large animal for a spade.
- 2 Chop, chop! Get your **flint** or **porcellanite** axe out. Chop down some hefty trees for the posts to support the walls and roof. Keep the branches you have cut off the tree - they'll come in handy later!
- 3 Now, put the posts into the holes, but not until you've placed a piece of pottery or some bones or maybe even a new arrowhead as a lucky charm in the hole. Perhaps this will bring luck to your home. Maybe it will make sure you'll always have food. Then again, perhaps you're renting the ground for your home from the Earth. Or maybe there's another reason for this we don't know - what do you think that could be? Next, put stones around the post to hold it in place and then fill in the hole.

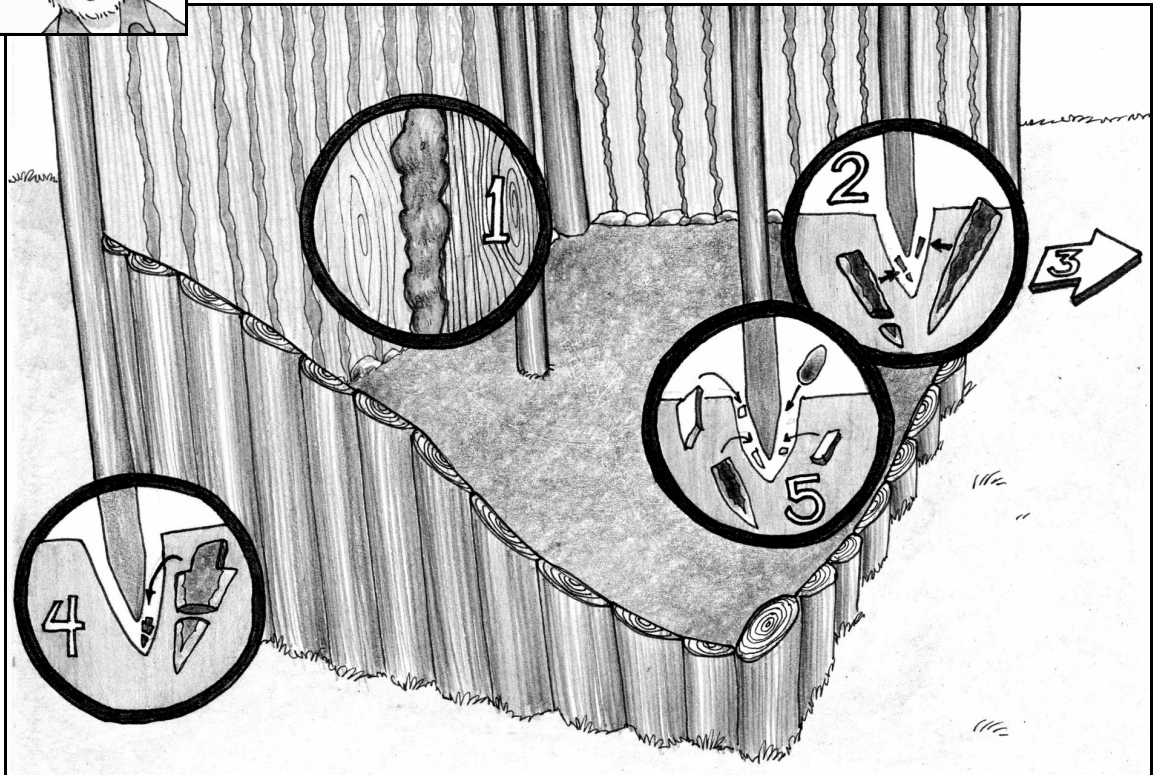


- 4 Chop, chop, chop! Cut down lots more trees. Split them into planks.
- 5 Place the planks upright in the trenches. Try not to leave big gaps between the planks. Use stones to hold the planks in place. Oh, and don't forget to leave a gap in the south wall for the door! Putting the door in the south wall will let in lots of light, as well as you!
- 6 Raise the roof! Cut more trees to make the roof supports - use some of the larger branches you cut off earlier. Hazel or willow branches could be cut to make more roof supports - they're strong but bendy. Perfect! Tie them in place with cords made from bendy wood, **sinew** or leather.
- 7 **Thatch** the roof! Gather lots and lots of reeds from the lakes and use them to cover the roof.
- 8 Draught-proof the walls! Fill the gaps in the walls with a mixture of grass or straw and sticky, wet clay.



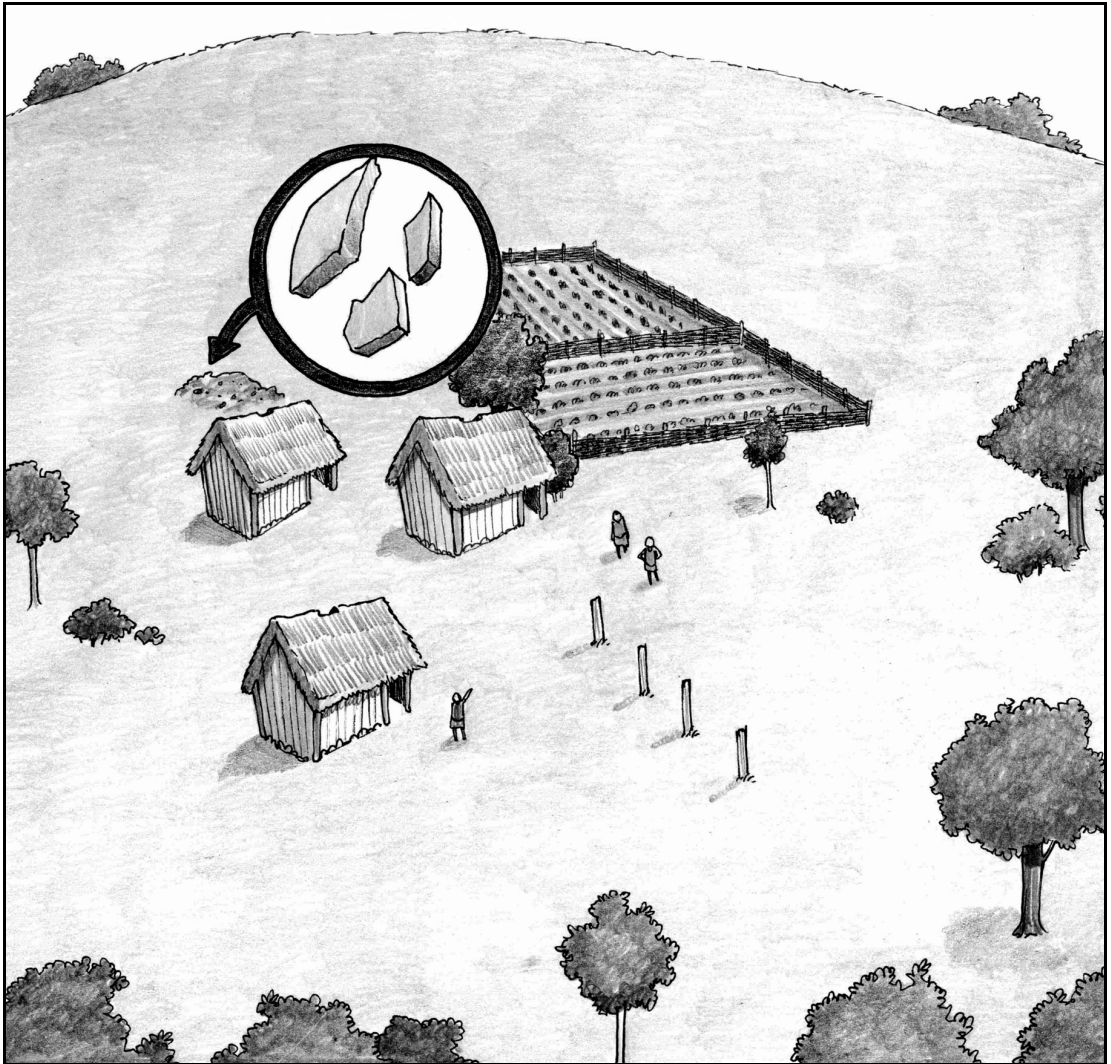


This is the first evidence of Neolithic houses found in County Down, Northern Ireland. The traces of them left in the ground gives us excellent evidence for how Niall's house was built.



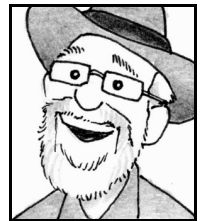
- 1 Burnt wood and clay shows the walls were made of timber packed with clay. The clay would have stopped draughts.
- 2 A slender flint blade and a broken portion of flint blade. These didn't show any sign of wear and seemed to be unused. They may have been deliberately placed into the posthole - an example of what archaeologists call a **ritual deposit**.
- 3 The gap in the south wall is likely to be a doorway.
- 4 A broken arrowhead was found in the bottom of the posthole. Another example of a '**ritual deposit**' - something deliberately placed to bring luck, good hunting, to rent the ground for the house, to claim the land as their own, or for some reason we just don't know.
- 5 The postholes inside the house contained all kinds of artefacts - **sherds** (broken pieces) of Neolithic pottery, polishing stones, a flint scraper, a damaged flint blade, and pieces of burnt bone. These all point towards the building being used as a home. There is evidence that the house was repaired when posts rotted away. Sweepings from the floor would have got into the postholes that were dug for these repairs. It may be that these artefacts were put into the postholes for some reason we don't understand. One interesting item was a smooth sandstone pebble with a black coating on one half.

In a Neolithic Garden



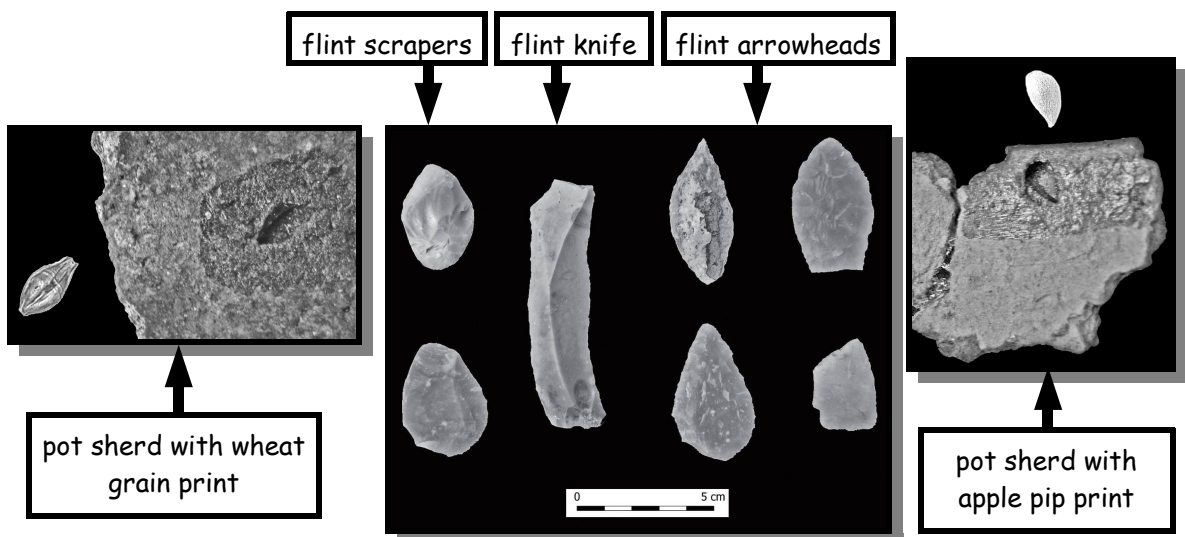
Well, this is what we think the Neolithic settlement at Ballintaggart looked like.

Can you see the **midden**? A midden was a rubbish dump. It was behind the houses - out of sight out of mind, just like your local rubbish tip! The midden gives us information about what the Neolithic people had been using and had thrown away.



A lot of finds were recovered from here. There were **sherds** from 51 different pots. One of these sherds had an impression of an apple pip in it. Another had a piece of charred wheat stuck to it. Evidence of what they ate! Not only that, the large number of different pots suggests they were making their own pots close by.

There were 52 items made from flint and quartz, including flint scrapers and lots of pieces of waste flint. This means that they were making their own tools, arrowheads and spearheads from flint and quartz.



Look back at the drawing of the Neolithic Settlement. Can you see the stone row?

Well it could be seen from the door of each house. It was meant to be seen. The stones in the row were most probably between 0.5m and 2.0m tall. The stone row was built to last, and last it did! It lasted for at least 2000 years. The Bronze Age people did not damage the

stone row when they built their barrows. In fact, some of the barrows follow the same line as the stones, but more of that later when we get to the Bronze Age!

Near to the stone row were two ritual pits. It is likely that the pits had mounds of soil above them. They could also be seen from the houses.

So what were the pits and the stones for?

It seems that the pits and stones could be seen from all three of the houses. This tells us that daily life and the spiritual beliefs of the family were not separate activities for these people. The stone row may have been a very visible sign that the people who lived there claimed the land as their own.

In the pits we found sherds of pottery from 13 plain and 13 carinated bowls. Carinated bowls have rims at the top that are much wider than the base. Also found were some bits of bone, flint, burnt hazelnut shells, and two near perfect arrowheads.

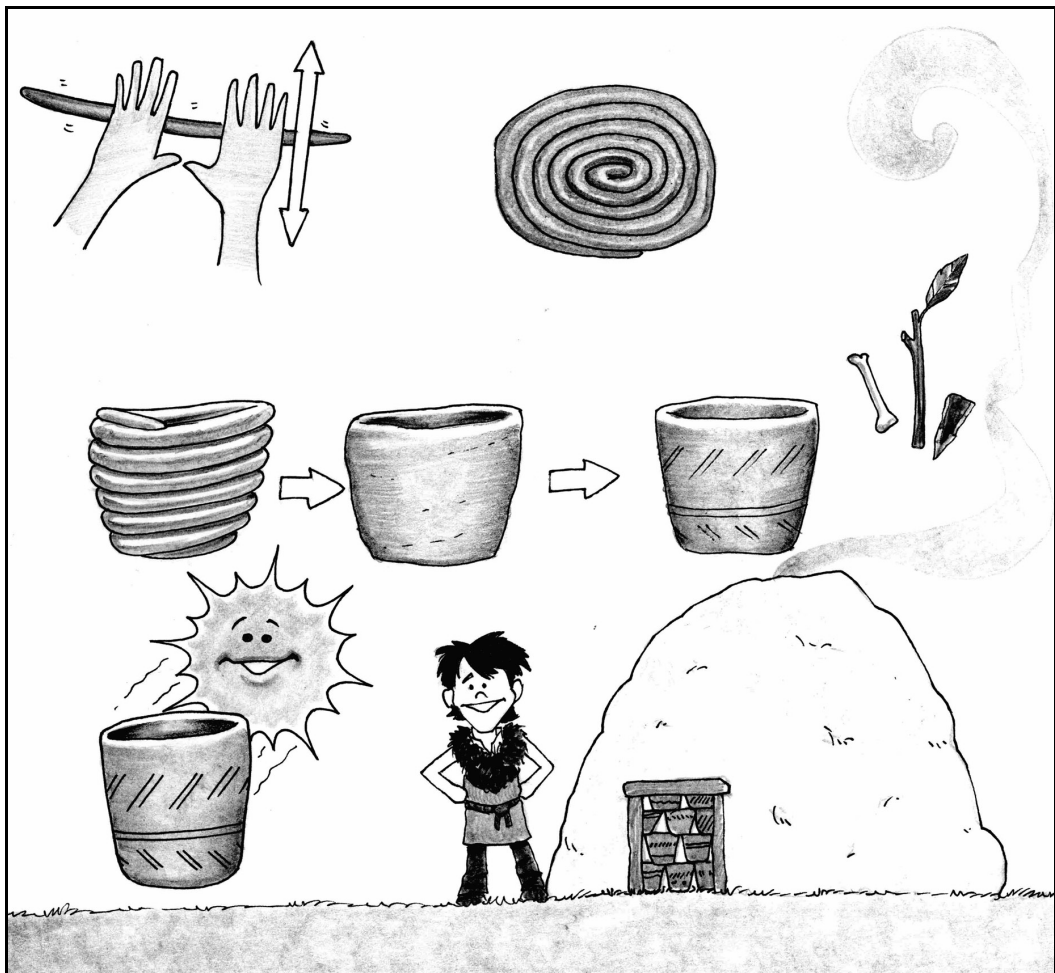
These arrowheads weren't thrown away because they were broken - it may be they were put into the pits for a ritual reason, maybe to ensure good luck in hunting, or as thanks for a good hunt, or as another way to claim the land for their own, or they could have just been left inside some uncooked meat placed in the pits, or maybe it was for another reason that we really don't know!

If the bone fragments that were found were human, then they may have been put into the pit as another sign that the family living here claimed the land. *'Our ancestors are here - the land is ours'*

Going Potty

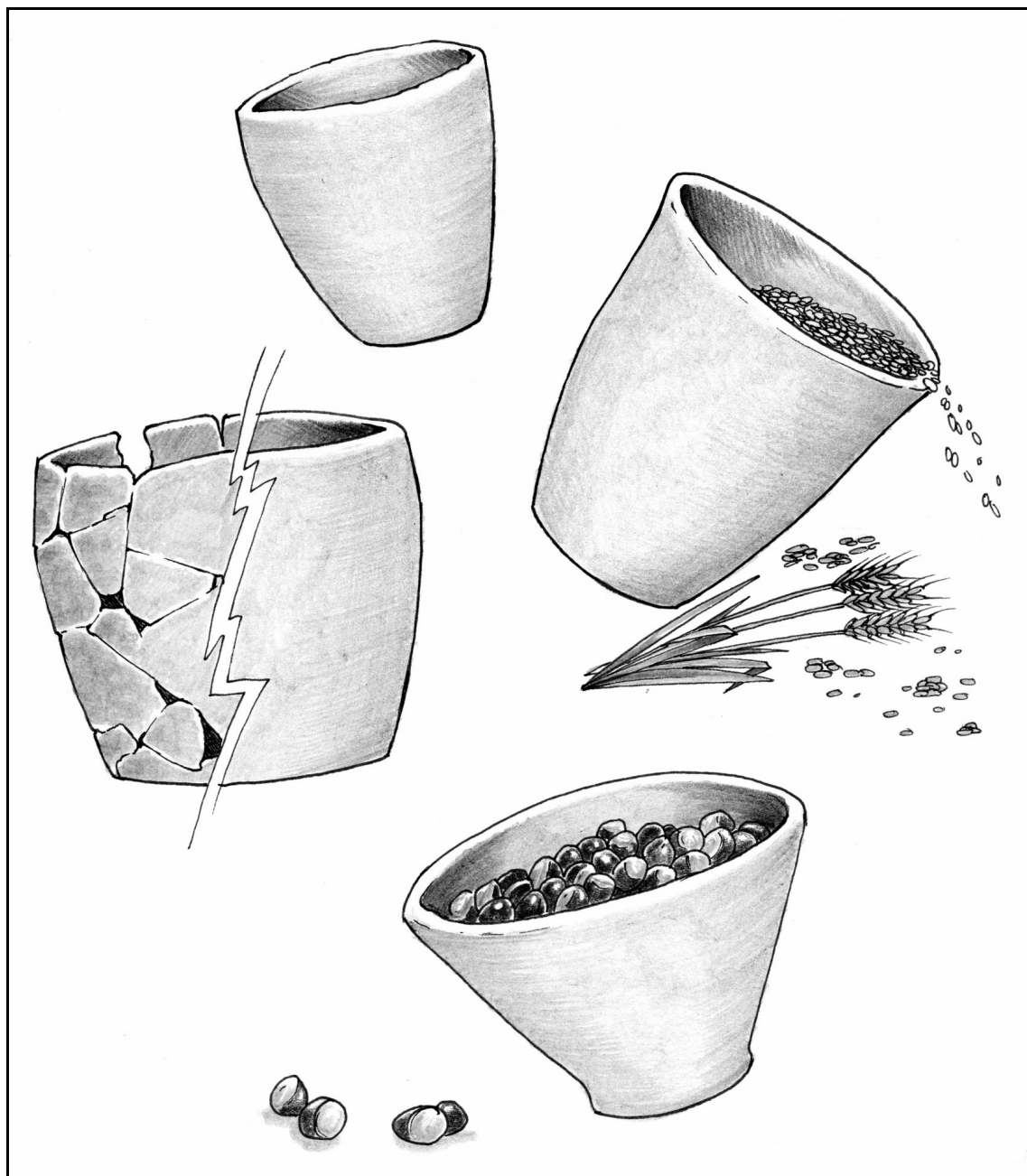
In the Neolithic, there weren't any shops or supermarkets. You would have to make your own bowls and plates for storing, eating and cooking your food. Here's how to do just that

- 1 Make some 'worms' of clay, as evenly as you can.
- 2 Coil the clay worms around each other to make the bottom of the pot. Use a little water to make it stick if you need to.
- 3 Every now and again stop coiling and use damp hands to smooth the coils together on the outside and inside of the pot.
- 4 Keep building up until you have the pot size you'd like.
- 5 You could leave the pot plain, or you could decorate it.
- 6 Leave the pot to dry until it's like stiff leather.
- 7 Bake the pot until it's hard in a kiln.





And here are some of the pots we found at Ballintaggart. Do you think you could make pots like this? How would you make patterns on your bowls? You could use your fingers, sticks, twine, or even tiny bird bones. If you use your fingers, you leave thumbprints, fingerprints and fingernail impressions in the clay.



The drawings show how the pots may have been used. They were used for storing food and for cooking too. Putting a small amount of fat into a little pot and setting fire to the fat could make a lamp.

Food for thought ...

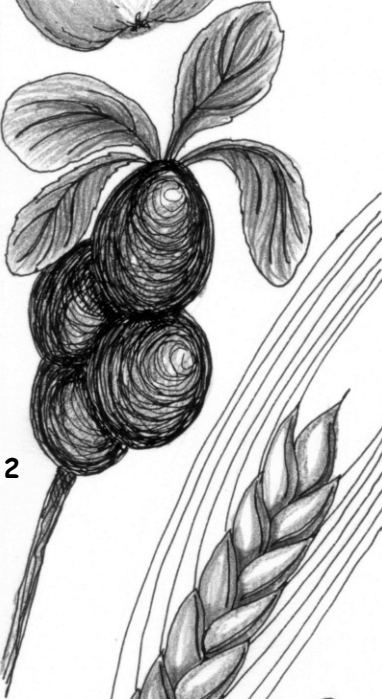
1



You must be very hungry after all this hard work building, gardening and potting! In the Neolithic, there were no shops, or supermarkets, or take-aways. You'd have to farm, hunt and gather food for yourselves. So what food would you have available to eat? How do we know that it was available?



2



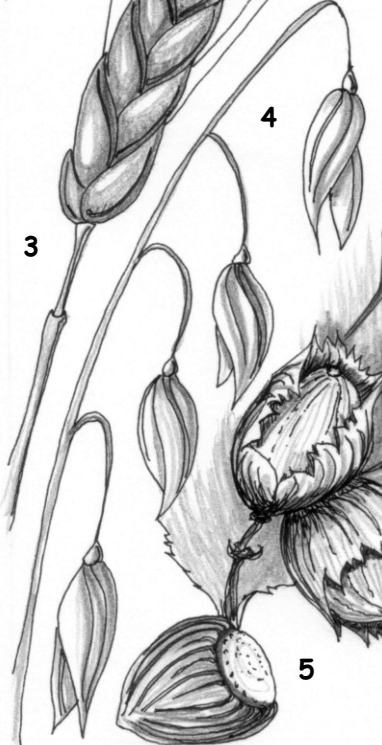
Well, you could hunt animals such as pig, deer, birds, and fish. You'd be able to do this all year round. You may be able to farm pigs instead of hunting them. We know pigs were eaten as we found pig bones in the ritual pits, wall slots and midden. We couldn't tell if they were wild or farmed pig..

You could grow your own wheat (3) and oats (4) and harvest them in early summer. Pots and holes in the ground can be used to store the grains to eat later. We found prints of wheat and oat grains in some of the pot sherds and grain in some wall slots.

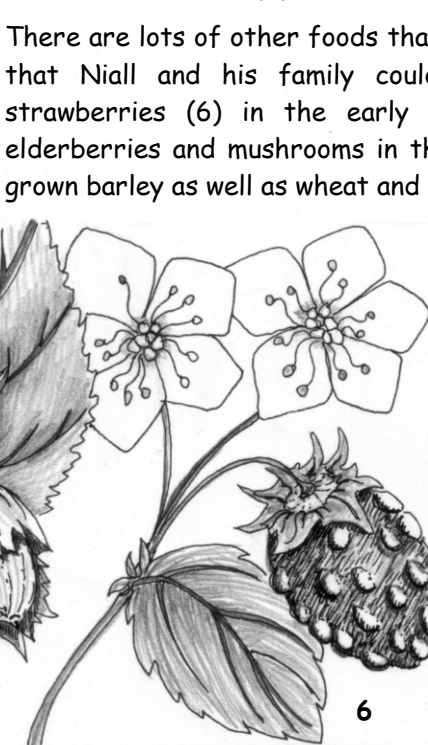
In the Autumn you could gather crab apples (1), sloe-berries (2), and hazelnuts (5). Burned hazelnut shells were found in the wall slots, postholes and the ritual pits. Prints of a sloe-stone and an apple pip were found in pot sherds. If you store these foods carefully you could eat them later too.

There are lots of other foods that we didn't find evidence of that Niall and his family could have eaten too - wild strawberries (6) in the early summer, blackberries (7), elderberries and mushrooms in the autumn. They may have grown barley as well as wheat and oats.

3



4



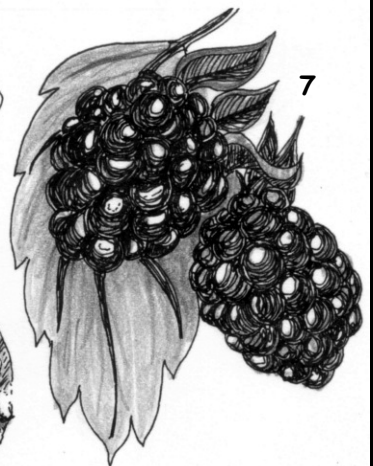
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6



7



Angela Porter April 2009

Fantastic flint ... and other stones!



In the Neolithic all the tools and weapons were made from animal bones, **antlers**, wood, and **flint** and other stones.

Flint was the stone most often used for tools. It is a very strong stone and when you break flint in a special way, called **knapping**, you get very sharp edges on it.

Do you fancy some pork for your dinner? First, you have to catch a pig! Pigs are big, fast and clever animals. You should take a few friends with you to help hunt a pig, trap it and then kill it. If you're going to shoot it, you will need several arrows to use in your bow. Or, you could use spears, but that means getting close to the pig. Don't fancy catching a pig now? Let's go and hunt some birds to eat - but you will still need a bow and arrow. Here's how to make an arrow.

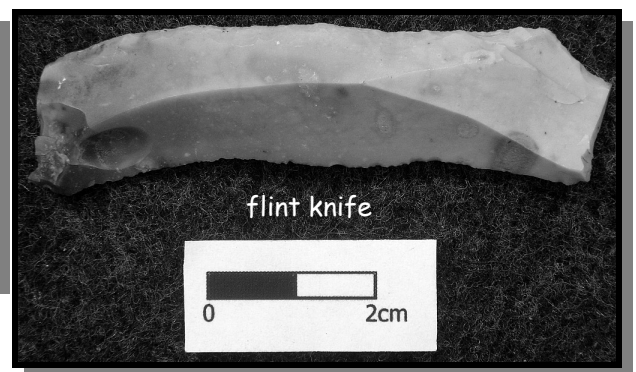


It's not an easy job, is it? If you were very good at knapping it could take as little as 15 minutes to make one arrowhead. It would then take you another hour or two to make this into an arrow. So, it would take quite some time for you to make enough arrows to ensure a successful hunt.

You'd also have to make your own bow. That would take a lot more time. You have to find the right wood, shape it with flint tools, bend it, make the bowstring ...

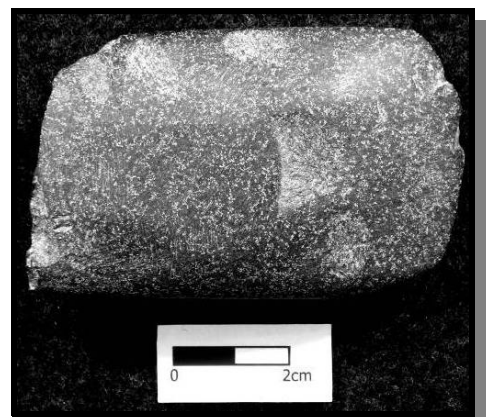
Making a spear would take you a couple of hours - knap the flint, cut the shaft of the spear, fix the flint in place. You would also need more than one spear to have a successful hunt.

But arrows aren't the only things we made from flint.

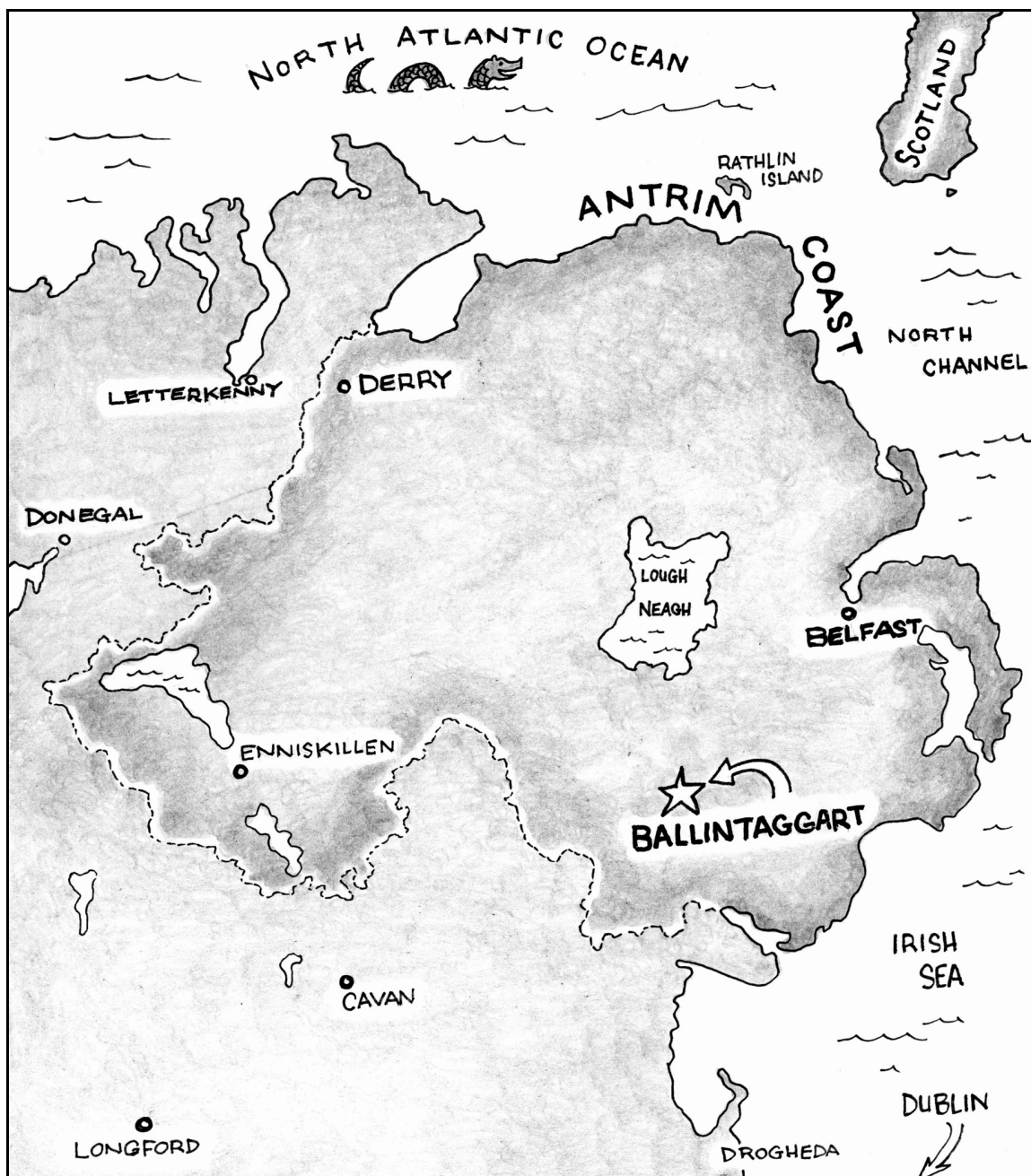


A broken axe head made from a rock called **porcellanite** was also found.

Porcellanite is a black and white speckled rock that is easy to shape, but it is hard and tough. Axes that are made from porcellanite mean it would be easier and quicker to chop down trees. This axe head seemed to have been deliberately broken and put into one of the wall slots of House 1 - possibly another ritual offering when the house was being built.



Flint and porcellanite aren't found near Ballintaggart. So where could these rocks have come from?



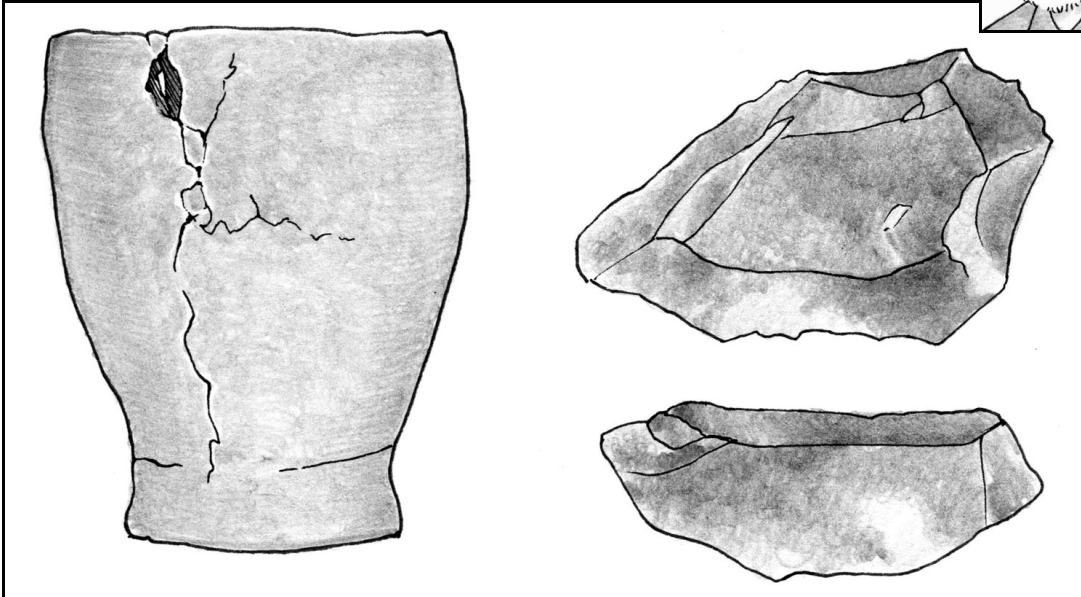
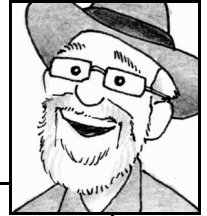
The closest source of flint was around the Antrim coast which is about 50 miles away from Ballintaggart.

Porcellanite is not a very common rock. It's found on Rathlin Island in north east Antrim, that's about 75 miles away, or, in the Neolithic, at least one week's walk and a boat trip away!.

Tools made from porcellanite from Rathlin Island have been found as far away as England and southern France. This is good evidence of trade between the peoples of these places.

Later Neolithic Life

Eventually, the settlement was abandoned and burned down. Then, other people continued to use this land. Here are some of the **artefacts** (or finds) that were found from the later Neolithic (5000 to 4500 y.a.).



More pieces of pots, flint, burnt bone, burnt wood and charred hazelnut shells were found. Can you see any differences between these late period Neolithic pots and the early period Neolithic pots on page 10?

Well, the early pots tend to be quite fine with round bottoms and are usually undecorated. The later ones aren't quite so fine, have flat bottoms and are decorated with patterns cut into them.

One rather curious find was a slate disc was found in a pit to the south west of the site.

The disc was made from a type of stone called slate which is local to the area. The disc is almost circular. It is roughly shaped, but marks on its face and edges that show it's been ground down or sanded into shape.

What could it be?

It could be an unfinished bead for a necklace - they did have jewellery in the Neolithic. It could be a gaming counter for playing a Neolithic game something like snakes and ladders. It may be a 'hole' from a larger doughnut shaped disc. A lucky charm, perhaps. We just don't know.



Welcome to the Bronze Age!

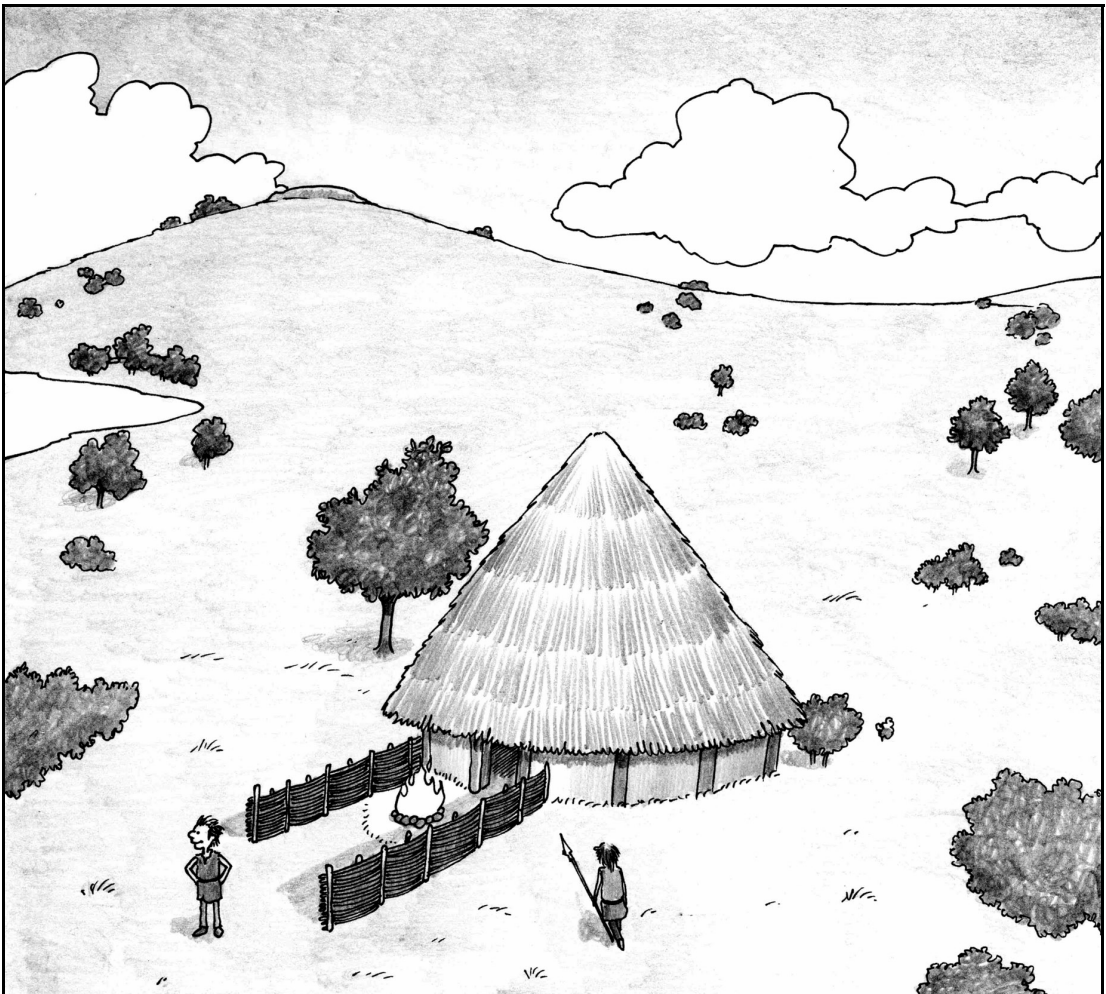


Welcome to the early Bronze Age! You're now at a time between 4000 and 3600 y.a. when people discovered the use of a metal called **bronze**. Bronze is a mixture of copper and tin. It was used to make tools and weapons - flint and other stones were no longer the only materials used to make these things. Bronze was also used to make jewellery.

The use of bronze wasn't the only change that happened between the Neolithic and Bronze ages - society seemed to change too. A new class of people - the warrior elite - appeared. People moved around a lot more too. As well as living in one place near their crops, they also lived in temporary campsites.

We found traces of such a temporary campsite not far from the Neolithic houses. This was a rather exciting and very special discovery - very few campsites of this age have been found anywhere in the world. This is the very first one found in Northern Ireland.

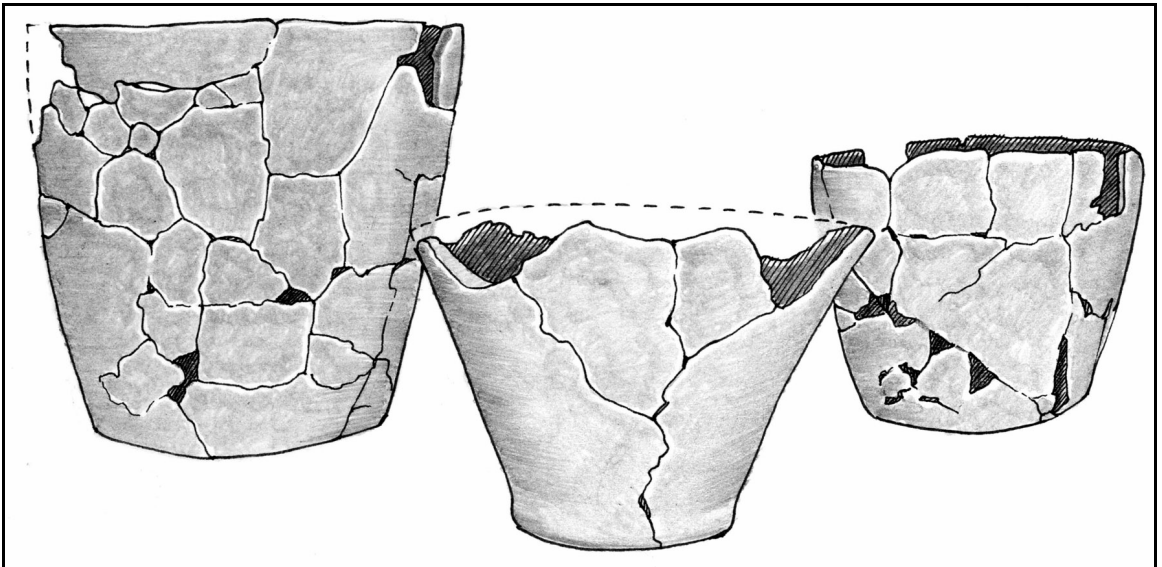
This drawing shows what we think it looked like based on the evidence we found.



We know the campsite didn't damage the Neolithic stone row and ritual pits. This must mean that the early Bronze Age people could still see these Neolithic features.

Why did they camp here? Well, most probably because the site is such a good source of **natural resources** (useful things) that they could hunt and gather such as birds, fish, clay, wood, reeds, pig, deer, and much, much more - the same reasons that the Neolithic people chose to settle here in fact. Some things never change!

Perhaps the stone row and ritual pits were an extra reason for camping here. Maybe they saw the land as 'sacred ground' as the people who used to live here had marked it out as being special in some way.



Now here's a pretty little pot, and a very interesting little pot it is too. Tiny pots like this have been found before in human graves. This pot was found in a pit, not a grave. Yes, the pit is within a barrow cemetery, but the pot wasn't in one of the burials. In fact, we don't know if the campsite had anything to do with the barrow cemetery in the first place.

Can you see the marks on the little pot? How do you think they were made?

They are fingernail marks! Isn't it amazing to think that we can see the shape of someone's fingernails from so long ago? Sometimes we can even see fingerprints in the clay. The person may have left the marks to show who made the pot. Or, they may have been for decoration. Or, maybe, they were accidentally left there.

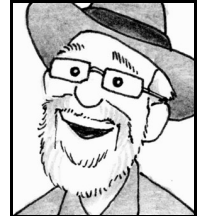
What was the pot used for? Well, maybe it was a child's toy. Perhaps it held burning incense. It may have held burning oil or fat as a small lamp. Maybe it was a pot made to test new clay, or perhaps an it was made by an **apprentice** being taught how to make pots. Can you think of any other things it may have been used for?

Ballintaggart Barrows



Between 3620 and 2780 y.a., we used this land as a cemetery. We built **barrows** to mark where the cremated remains of people special to us were buried. Maybe the cemetery marked a boundary of our land - it warned other tribes they were getting close to us.

The drawing shows what we think Ballintaggart looked like in the Bronze Age. You can see the barrows. Barrows aren't something that Bronze Age gardeners used, though they could be a spooky kind of garden feature! Barrows are graves that the Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples built.



Usually the **cremated remains** (the burned bones) of a person (or persons) were buried in a pit in the middle of the barrow. Later **cremations** may be added to the pit, or placed in holes dug into the mound. When the remains were buried they could be:

- put straight into the pit
- wrapped in cloth or leather before burial - the wrappings have rotted away over time
- put into a wicker basket or other container before burial - the container has rotted away
- put into pottery **funerary urn** before being buried - the urn may have been specially made for the funeral, or any available pot may have been used as some have evidence they were used for cooking food in them!



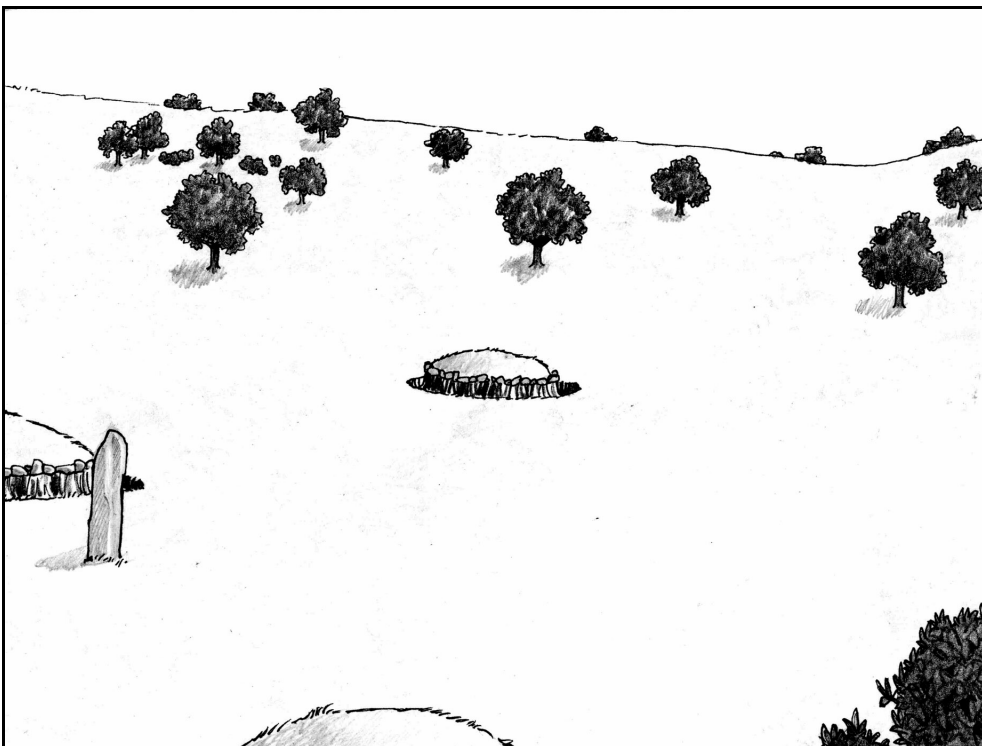


There's evidence of all this happening at Ballintaggart, as well as at Derrycraw, which is a little further south. But more about Derrycraw later.

Why was this place chosen for the barrow cemetery? Well, it's a special kind of place. The inch of land has water on two sides - that seems to be special to the Bronze Age people. We know the Bronze Age people revered 'wet places' - not just in Northern Ireland but in other places too, such as Flag Fen in Peterborough, England. Maybe the Bronze Age people believed that the land of the living and the land of the dead were closer here and the souls of the dead would have an easier journey to the after-world. Perhaps it was also that the land had been used for a

long time. The Neolithic stone row and ritual pits were still there in the Bronze Age. This showed their ancestors had lived there and so it would be a good place to honour their dead. It could be that it was a boundary between one tribe and another and the burials were a way of marking and reinforcing that boundary.

Add to this that on a hill to the north east is Brickland Barrow. It is a big barrow for Northern Ireland - it measures 30 m from side to side. You can see it easily from the surrounding land, and there are great views from it too. The barrow may have been built for someone of great importance to the people of the area, such as the chief of a tribe. Their burial makes a big claim on the land. The barrow cemetery seems to be aligned (lines up) with Brickland Barrow and that may be to strengthen their claim on the land. Of course it may be for more than one of these reasons, or maybe for a completely different reason - we can't be sure. Can you think of a reason why it may be important?



Build Your Barrows

Organising a barrow burial in the Bronze Age takes a bit of doing. You need a lot of time. And, a lot of people. Here's one way you could build a barrow.



- 1 Chop! Chop! Did you really think you'd finished chopping down trees way back in the Neolithic? Did you think the hard work was over? Well, think again! We need lots of wood for the funeral **pyre** (it's like a bonfire). Once you've built the pyre, place the body on the top, perhaps with some food offerings to help them on their journey to the afterworld. You could say a few words, sing a song or two, or do some dancing or other ceremonies - just like a school assembly but not as boring!
- 2 Set fire to the pyre. It will look like a big bonfire - but no fireworks, not in the Bronze Age.
- 3 When the fire burns out, collect the bones. Be careful! They may still be hot!. Break up the larger bits. Put the bones into a container - a pot, a basket, or a leather bag.



- 4 Dig! Dig! Thought you'd done with digging? Think again! You now need to dig a pit to put the cremated bones in. Once they're in the pit, you could put a big stone called a **capstone** over the bones.
- 5 Dig! Dig! Dig! Yes, that's right, you have even more digging to do. This time you need to dig a circular ring ditch around the pit. The ring could be up to 15m in **diameter** (from side to side) - that's about eight tall people laid down in a straight line. That's a big ditch! You'll need to make the ditch between 50 cm and 100 cm deep and between 30 cm and 100 cm wide. All the soil you dig up needs to be piled over the pit inside the ring ditch to make a mound.
- 6 Think you deserve a rest? Not yet! You need to cover the mound with stones so your hard work isn't spoiled. If you use stones that have a lot of **quartz** in them they will sparkle in the sunlight, marking the mound as very special in some way. Perhaps it will show how very loved the person or persons were, or how important they were. Also, the stones will stop the rain washing the mound into the ditch as well as stopping animals digging up the bones.
- 7 Now you can take a hard earned rest!

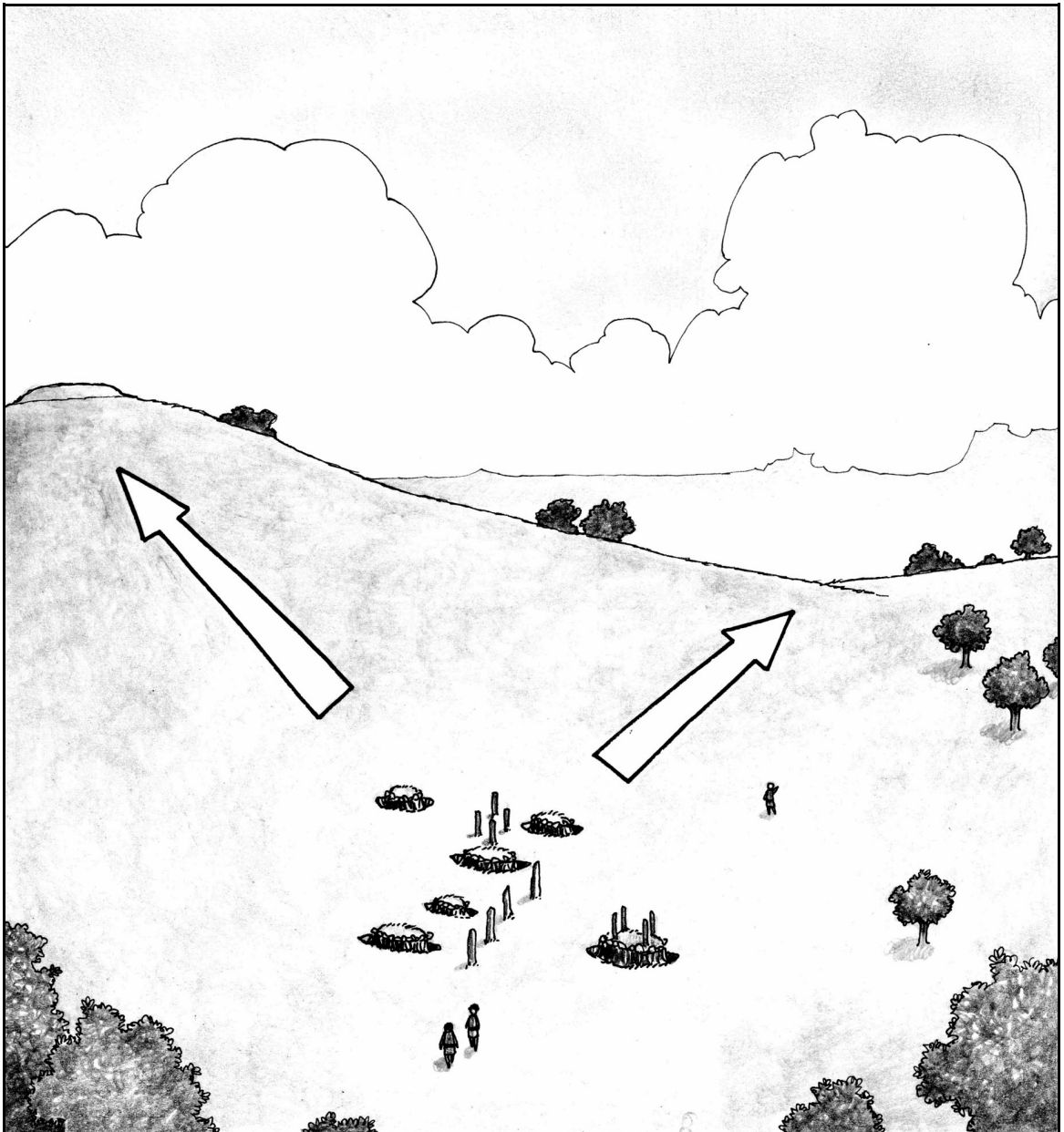


Something Unusual Is Going On...



We have a real puzzle here. In the barrow cemetery, two features called 'four-posters' were found. Each feature was square in shape, with four postholes marking out the square. The cremated remains were placed in a pit in the middle of these postholes.

These two four posters, along with a pit beneath one of the ring ditches seem to be evenly spaced. They also seem to be pointing to Brickland Barrow. Are they acknowledging an older and larger site? By pointing to Brickland Barrow does this make them more important? Is there some other reason they seem to be pointing this way? What do you think? Certainly, something unusual is going on here, and that makes it special.



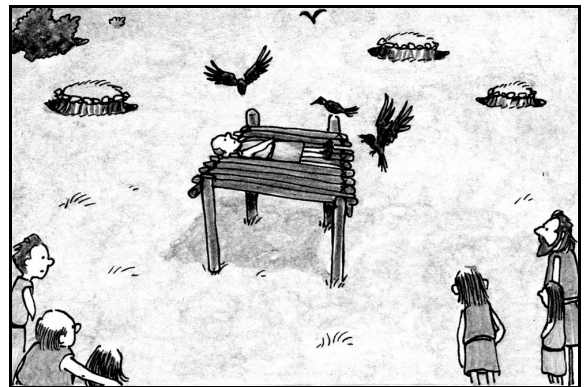
We don't know what these structures were for sure, but we can make some good guesses.

They could've been supports for a funeral pyre. The remains of the person were buried in the middle of the square.



Then again, they could've been the supports for **excarnation** platforms.

Excarnation is where a body is left for the birds and animals and natural forces to remove all flesh from the body, leaving just the bones. The bones were then cremated so a smaller pyre would be needed.



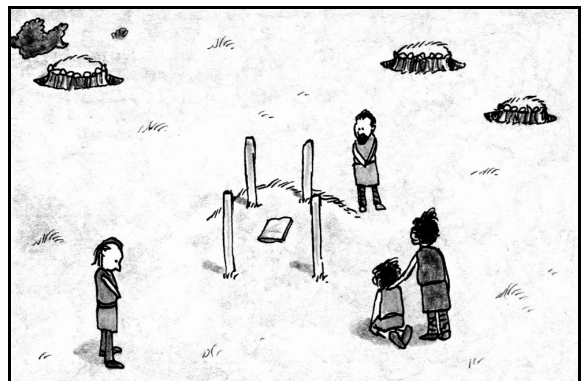
The posts could have been the corner posts of a small **mortuary house**.

A mortuary house is a place where a dead body is placed before it is buried.



Or, the posts could have been for some other purpose... perhaps just as markers for a special burial.

Or, they may have been for another purpose that we don't understand today. Can you think of any other purposes?

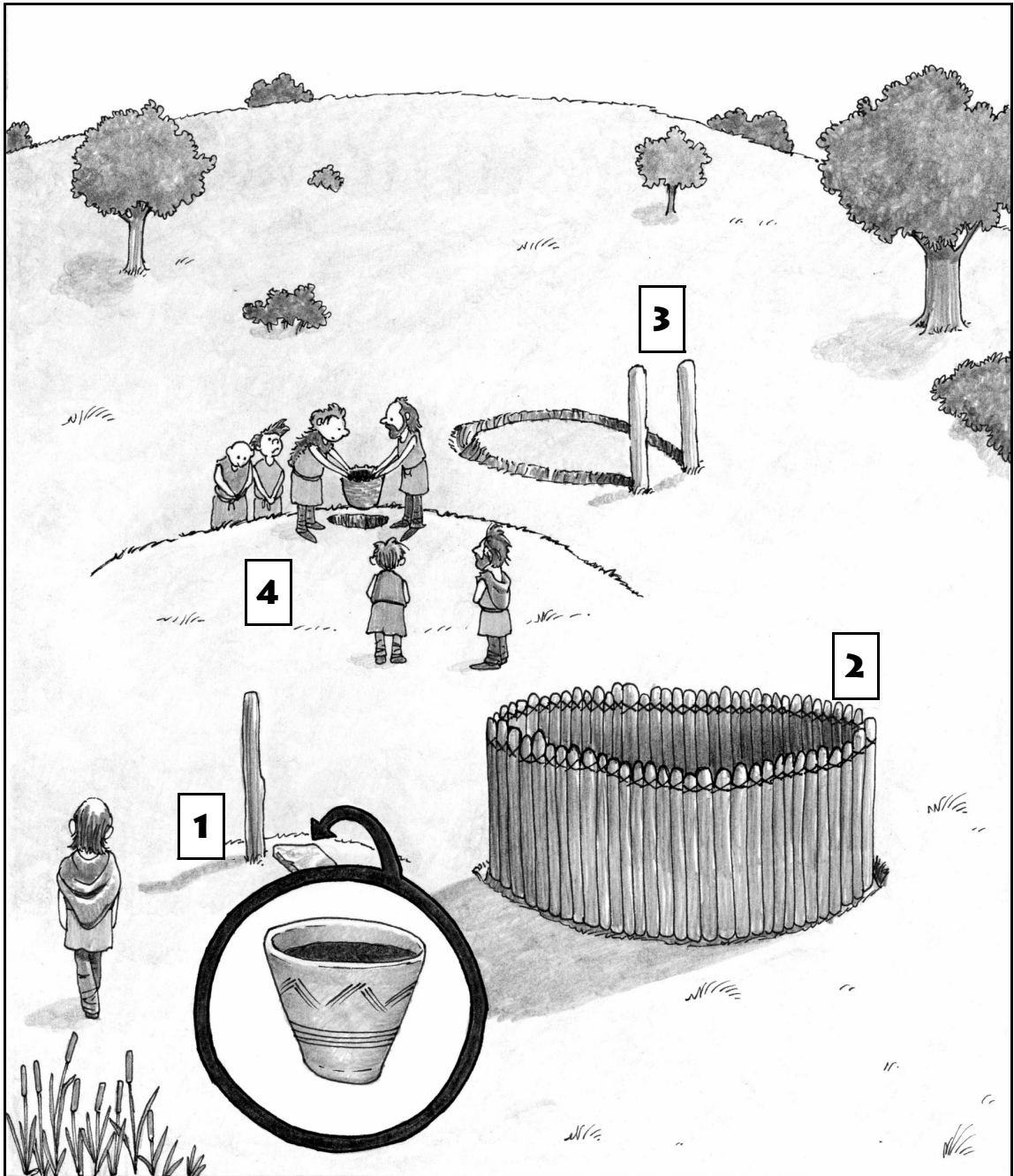


More Barrows at Derrycraw

Between 3600 y.a. and 2900 y.a. a barrow cemetery was in use at Derrycraw, which is 4 miles south of Ballintaggart.



The cemetery is on a piece of land with wet, boggy land around it - just as at Ballintaggart! Remember, pieces of land near water were special to the Bronze Age people. And, just as at Ballintaggart, there are some unusual things going on with lots of puzzles we may never know the answers to.



- 1 In this pit we found a complete **funerary urn**. Inside it were the cremated bones of a man aged 25 to 45 years of age. On top of the urn was a capstone. A posthole was right next to the urn and it would have had a hefty post in it, making the burial easily seen.

This was the earliest burial we found at Derrycraw, so it could be that this burial marked the start of this land being used as a cemetery. It could be that this person was of some importance to the people who buried him which is why a post marked his burial. Or it may have been a burial to claim the land, the post being a visible sign. Or it could be for another reason. What do you think?



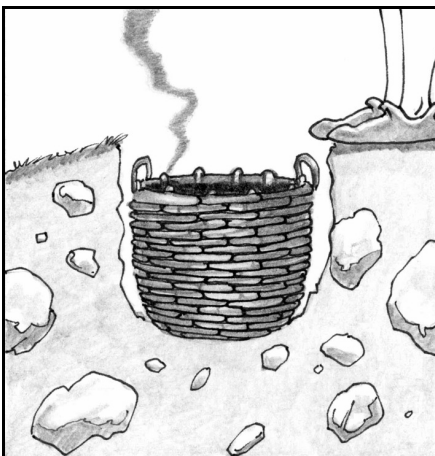
- 2 No bones were found here, but we did find a narrow 'slot' cut into the bottom of the ring ditch. We think this could have held planks or stakes to make a **palisade** (a fence). Perhaps the palisade was to stop nosy people watching private funeral ceremonies. Maybe they were the walls of a **mortuary enclosure** - a place where the body was prepared for cremation. Perhaps the walls just marked out a sacred place. It may have been used in a way we in the 21st century just don't understand. Can you come up with any other ideas?

- 3 This is a really unusual ditch, a real puzzle. It's shaped like a horseshoe - archaeologists call it a **penannular** ditch. At the ends of the horseshoe we found two big postholes. These holes would have held posts that stood 2 or 3 metres tall. In the centre of this barrow were the remains of a person aged 25 to 35 years old.

Why was the ditch horseshoe shaped with the posts at the ends? Did the posts mark an entrance to the barrow? Did they mark the barrow as being special in a different way? Were the posts plain, decorated or carved? Can you think of any other reasons for the shape of the ditch and the posts? What do you think the posts looked like?

- 4 The evidence suggests there was a **cairn** here. A cairn is a pile of stones. It would have been big - an easily seen feature in the cemetery. A jet spacer bead from a necklace was found here - more about this important bead later.

We found three burials in the remains of the cairn. One of these burials was an unusual '*basket burial*'. It was found in a pit dug into the cairn.



The basket was made of elder wood. There seems to have been handles at the top of the basket. The wood was burnt in places. This tells us that the cremated bones would still have been hot when they were put into the basket and then into the pit. We know the bones were from a young person aged between 13 and 17. What we don't know is why their cremated remains were put into the cairn. It may have been to do with re-stating a claim on the land, or because of an important event, or they may have been a person of some importance. Or it may be for any number of other reasons. What ideas can you come up with?

So, who got buried?

What do we know about who was buried in the ring barrows we found at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw? What do the cremated bones we found tell us about the people who lived, died and were buried in these places?

Well there were 15 people cremated and then buried in the barrows at Ballintaggart. At Derrycraw we found the remains of 5 people buried in the barrows.



| Adults | | | Children | | |
|--------|--------|------------|----------|--------|------------|
| Male | Female | Can't tell | Male | Female | Can't tell |
| 4 | 5 | 4 | - | - | 7 |

| Age Range (years) | New born baby | 3-6 | 7-18 | 19-25 | 25-35 | 25-45 | 35+ |
|-------------------|---------------|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Number of People | 1 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 5 | 2 |

At Ballintaggart, the barrow cemetery was in use for between 500 and 800 years. During this time there would have been 35 to 40 **generations** of people. That's a lot of people! A lot more people than the 15 we found in our excavations. Even fewer people were found at Derrycraw and the barrow cemetery there was in use for a similar length of time.

So, why were these 20 buried in barrows at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw? Remember, the barrows would have been easily seen. Also, it took a lot of effort by the people left behind to collect the wood for each pyre and to build each barrow. These were burials that were memorable for some reason.

Well, the data shows us that men, women, teenagers, children and babies were buried in the barrows. So, it seems you didn't have to die when you were very old, or very young, or at any particular age to be buried in a barrow.

We didn't find any gold or silver grave goods. Metal treasures aren't often found in Irish Bronze Age burials. However, there are hundreds of **hoards** of buried treasure found all over Ireland. This could mean that the people believed you couldn't take your wealth with you, that it was all there waiting for you in the next life. Of course, we wouldn't have found precious items made from **organic materials** such as leather, wood, clothing or even food offerings as they would have rotted away over time. This seems to tell us that you didn't have to be wealthy to be buried in a barrow.

So, what ideas do we have about why these people were buried in barrows? The answer is that we just don't know - they didn't leave us written records explaining why these people deserved a barrow. Here's some possibilities. Perhaps you can come up with some more ideas.

- Were the burials to mark significant events?
- Were they to stake a claim on the land by marking the boundaries of the people that lived here?
- Were they born at a special time or did they die at a special time?
- Were they from a special family? Were they from a noble family?
- Had these people died in tragic ways?
- Had they been ritually killed and then buried here as an offering to the gods these people believed in?
- Were they considered special in ways we can't understand in the 21st century?

The barrows we found and excavated contained the remains of only 20 people. What happened to all the hundreds of other people when they died?

Again, we just don't know. We can make some guesses though, and perhaps you can come up with some more.

- They may have been cremated and their bones put into the lakes.
- They may have just been left in the world to decay and disappear over time.
- There may be other barrows we've not found at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw ... yet.



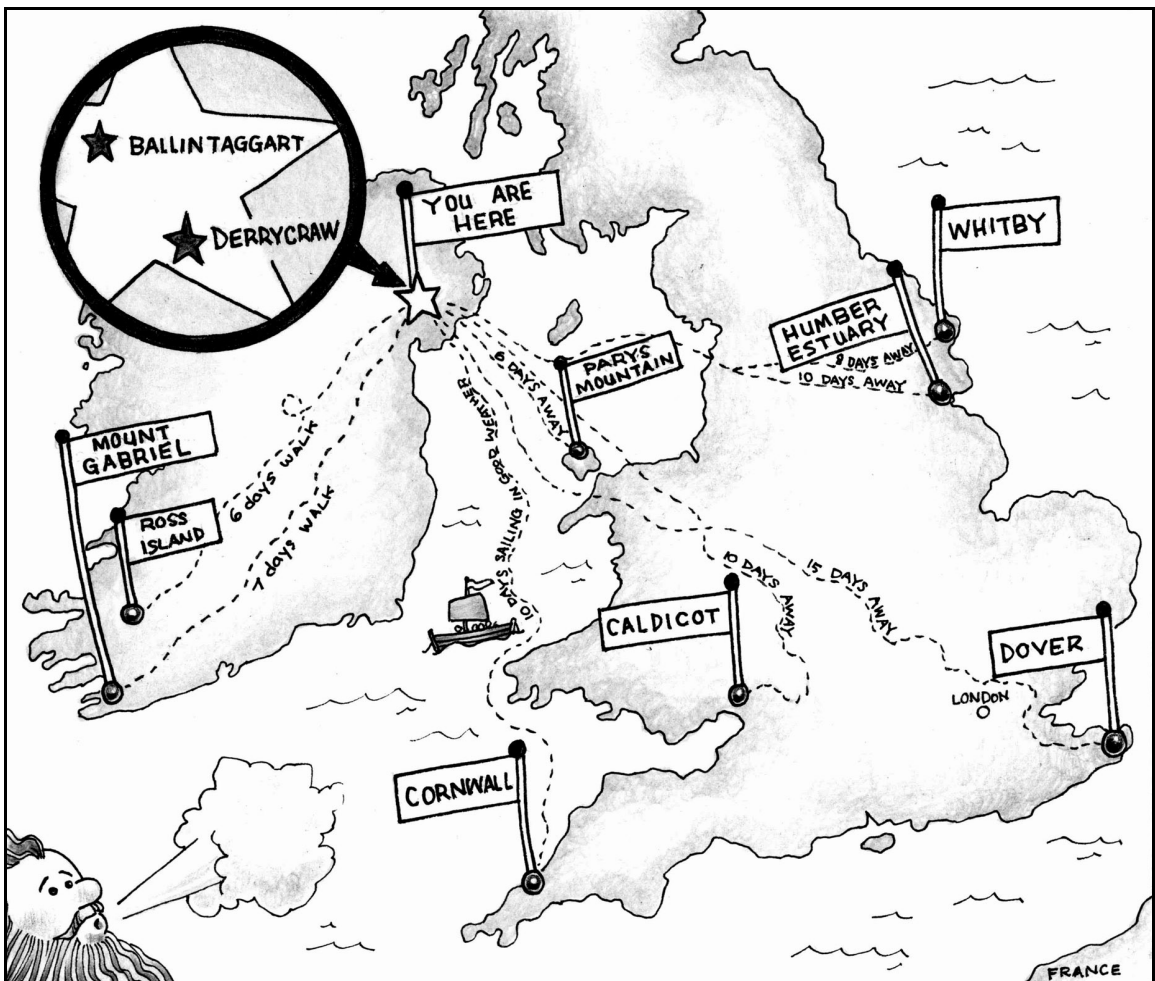
Remember, the digs were of only small areas of land at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw. In the future archaeologists may find more barrows or may investigate the lake and bog. The evidence we find there may help us to answer these questions, or it may just raise more questions for us to puzzle over.

Jewels and Trade

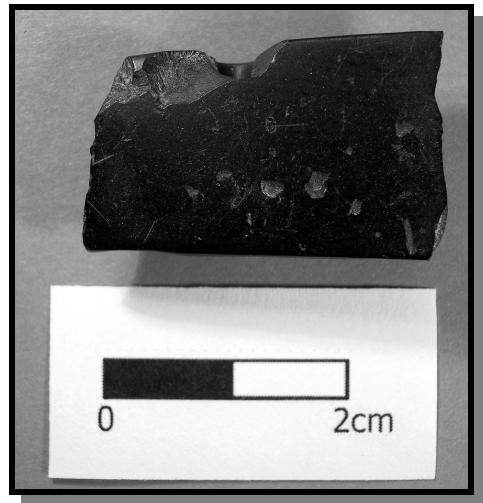
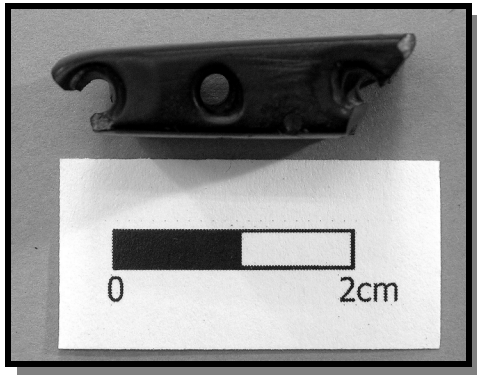
At Derrycraw a bead made from a stone called **jet** was found. Bron's modelling a jet necklace that it could've been part of. Doesn't she look lovely?

This beautiful jet bead tells us that people made and wore jewellery in the Bronze Age. However, that isn't the most exciting thing about this bead. Where the jet came from, how it got to Derrycraw, and what this tells us about the Bronze Age people is very exciting!

Jet isn't found in Northern Ireland. The most likely source of jet is Whitby, in Yorkshire, England. Look at the map. That's a long way away! It's a long way to walk, and you have to take a risky boat trip across the Irish Sea too.



Photographs of the jet spacer bead.



Jet isn't the only evidence there is for long distance trade. No bronze objects were found at either Ballintaggart or Derrycraw, but the people who lived there in the Bronze Age would have used bronze.

Bronze is made from copper and tin. Copper and tin are metals made from rocks called **ores**. Ores are rocks that contain a lot of a metal. They need to be mined from the Earth - that takes a lot of effort.

Where were they mined?

Well, copper ores were mined in Ireland during the Bronze Age at Ross Island, Mount Gabriel and Derrycarhoon. These are all in Southern Ireland, a long way from Ballintaggart and Derrycraw. Copper could also have come from Parys Mountain, Wales, again a long way from Ballintaggart.

Tin ores, however, are rare in Ireland. The closest sources were in Cornwall in England.

What does this all mean?

Well, it tells us that people either moved around a lot, or that there was trade going on over long distances. Not just long distances over land, but over the sea as well. So there must have been sea-going boats in the Bronze Age.

Archaeologists have found some remains of such boats - in Dover and the Humber estuary in England, and in Caldicot in Wales.

Flint was still being used for tools in the Bronze Age. The flint would have come from sources a distance away from Ballintaggart and Derrycraw, most probably the same sources as in the Neolithic (page 14).

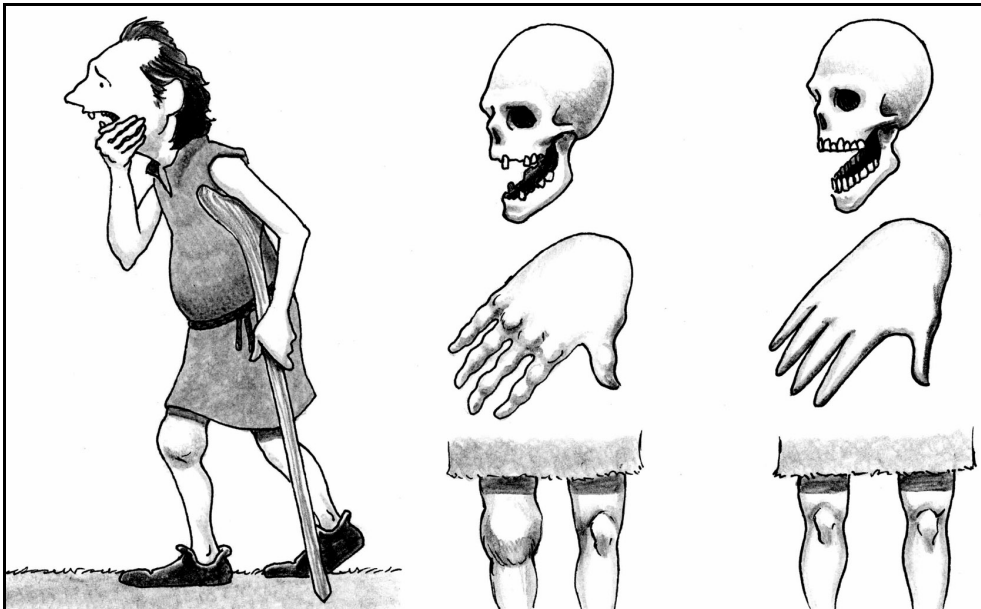
Not everything that the people used travelled over long distances - the funeral urns that were found in the barrows, for instance. They were made of clay found close to Ballintaggart and Derrycraw.

Bronze Age Ills



The **skeletal remains** don't just tell us about the ages and genders of the people buried in the barrows. Sometimes, they tell us about the illnesses and injuries these people suffered. And that can tell us something about their lifestyles.

Do you remember the complete funeral urn found in the pit with the posthole at Derrycraw? It contained the cremated remains of a man between 25 and 45 years of age. What do the remains tell us about him? Well, here he is, poor chap.



He suffered from toothache, arthritis, and a bad limp. How do we know this? The evidence is in the bones! An **osteoarchaeologist** looked at the bones and worked out what illnesses this chap had.

Look at his jawbone. There are teeth missing. Also, there's damage in the **tooth sockets** showing he had lots of problems with toothache.

Look at his hand. Can you see the lumpy bits on the ends of the bones? That's called **arthritis**. His joints would have hurt and would have been stiff.

The damage on the knee joint is where a **tendon** is attached. He would have walked with a very bad limp, and would be in a lot of pain.

The arthritis and the damage to the knee tell us that the chap was most probably a farmer. How do we know? Well, his injuries are the same as those seen in hardworking farm workers in our own time. They're caused by a lot of heavy manual work such as bending, lifting, pulling, pushing, and so on.

Back to the present...

I'm always amazed at what archaeology can tell us about people from the past. In many ways they are just like us, in other ways they are very different. I'm sure you've noticed that as you've been reading.

What was the most surprising thing for you?

That people travelled such long distances in the past? That they made toys and played games? That they cared for their dead and built cemeteries just as we do today? That they respected features from the past? That they made such beautiful pots and jewellery? That they ate a wide variety of foods? That they had the same illnesses and injuries that we do today? That they didn't live to a very old age? That we can learn so much about them from just a few traces in the Earth?

We have learned a lot about the people who lived at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw all that time ago. We also have a lot of unanswered questions and puzzles that have cropped up as we studied the evidence. This happens with archaeology. We usually end up with more puzzles and questions than we started with.

Did you enjoy trying to come up with some answers or ideas? Did you enjoy trying to solve the puzzles?

It's great fun trying to solve the mysteries of the past, especially the prehistoric past when the people didn't write and leave us records of their lives and important events. Solving mysteries is what archaeology is all about!

The digging is interesting, finding old things is fascinating, but then working out what it all means ... well that's the big challenge! And with a lot of things we will never know if we are right, but it's fun trying to explain the evidence, to solve the mystery. And who knows, some of the ideas you have had about the archaeology at Ballintaggart and Derrycraw may be the right ones ...



Glossary

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| antlers | Branched horns that grow out of a male deer's head. |
| apprentice | Someone learning a craft e.g. making pottery. |
| archaeologist | Someone who studies archaeology |
| archaeology | The study of long ago remains of people, their buildings, possessions and tools. |
| artefact | Things from the past found and studied by people today. |
| arthritis | Painful, swollen and stiff joints in the body. |
| barrows | A prehistoric grave The cremated remains of a person are buried in the middle of a mound of soil that has a ditch around it. |
| bronze | A metal made by melting a mixture of tin and copper. |
| Bronze Age | The time in the past when people started to make tools and weapons from bronze. |
| cairn | A pile of stones that cover a grave. |
| capstone | A flat stone that covers a hole with a burial in it. |
| cremated remains | All that's left of a dead person after their body has been burned - usually burned bones and teeth. |
| cremation | Burning a dead person's body as part of a funeral. |
| diameter | The distance across the middle of a circle. |
| evidence | Proof that something is real or that something has happened. |
| excarnation | The body is left in the open air for animals to eat the flesh or for it to rot away until just the skeleton is left. |
| flint | A hard stone used to make tools in prehistoric times. It can be knapped to shape it and give it a sharp edge. |
| funerary urn | A pot used to hold the cremated remains of a dead person as part of their funeral. |
| generation | The length of time before children take the place of their parents - around 30 years. |
| hoard | A hidden collection of treasure. |
| jet | A hard black stone that can be polished to make it nice and shiny. |
| kiln | A hot oven or fire for turning clay into pottery. |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| knapping | Hitting bits off a piece of flint or other stone to make a tool. |
| midden | A rubbish tip! |
| mortuary enclosure | A fenced off area where a dead body is left until it's ready for cremation and/or burial. |
| mortuary house | A house where a dead body is buried. |
| natural resources | Useful things from the Earth such as wood, reeds, fish, pigskin, flint or antlers. |
| Neolithic | The New Stone Age. People started to grow crops such as wheat, and farm animals such as pigs. and cows for food. |
| ore | A kind of rock that you can get a metal or gemstone from. |
| organic materials | All living things are made from organic materials such as hair, bone, wood. Organic materials rot away over time. |
| osteoarchaeologist | An archaeologist who studies skeletons. |
| palisade | A wooden fence, often built around a house or a village for defence. |
| penannular | Horse-shoe shaped, like a letter C |
| porcellanite | A hard rock, harder than flint, and which stays sharp longer. |
| Prehistory | The time before writing was invented and used to record events. |
| pyre | A big bonfire built to cremate (burn) a dead body as part of a funeral. |
| quartz | A hard, shiny rock, usually white or colourless. |
| ritual deposit | Deliberately leaving something in a pit or other place, perhaps to ensure good luck in hunting or a happy home. |
| sherd | A piece of broken pottery. |
| sinew | Holds muscles together. It can be taken from animals and used to make strong cord. |
| skeletal remains | Bits of a skeleton, bones. |
| tendon | Tendons are strong straps that join your muscles to your bones. |
| thatch | Straw or reeds used to make the roof of a house. |
| thatcher | Someone who uses straw or reeds to make a roof. |
| tooth sockets | The holes in your jaws where your teeth sit. |
| y.a. | Years Ago |

Useful Stuff...

If you are interested in archaeology you can find more information at:

- Northern Ireland Roads Service - www.roadsni.gov.uk
- Northern Archaeological Consultancy - www.northarc.co.uk
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency - www.ni-environment.go.uk
- Northern Ireland Young Archaeologists (NIYA) - www.britarch.ac.uk/yac

Belfast Branch of NIYA

Naomi Carver,
School of Archaeology & Palaeoecology
Queen's University Belfast
Northern Ireland
BT7 1NN
Tel: 028 9097 3728
Email: belfastyac@qub.ac.uk

Downpatrick Branch of NIYA

Mike King
Down County Museum
The Mall
English Street
Downpatrick, Northern Ireland
BT30 6AH
Tel: 028 4461 1951

Museums in Northern Ireland

Armagh County Museum

<http://www.armaghcountymuseum.org.uk>

Down County Museum

<http://www.downcountymuseum.com>

Enniskillen Castle Museum

<http://www.enniskillencastle.co.uk>

National Museums Northern Ireland

<http://www.magni.org.uk>

The Tower Museum

<http://www.derrycity.gov.uk/museums>

Ulster Museum

<http://www.ulstermuseum.org.uk>

Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

<http://www.uftm.org.uk>

Ulster American Folk Park

<http://www.folkpark.com>



Archaeological Timeline



The End of last Ice Age (12,000 y.a.)

Ice covered the sea and land. People could walk over it. Britain and Ireland formed when it melted.



The Mesolithic (10,000 to 6000 y.a.)

The first people arrive from over the sea to Ireland. They lived in tents and moved around a lot to hunt and gather food.



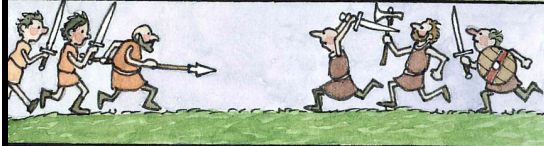
The Neolithic (6000 to 4500 y.a.)

People started to stay in one place and build houses. They started to learn how to farm - growing crops and animals for milk, food and clothing.



The Bronze Age (4500 y.a. to 2500 y.a.)

People lived in round houses. Some moved around stealing sheep and cattle and living in temporary campsites.



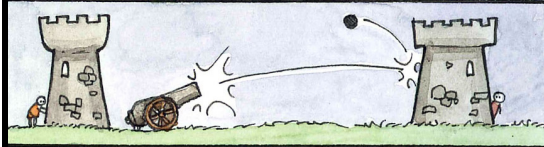
The Iron Age (2500 to 1600 y.a.)

People lived in clans and tribes, each with their own king. Iron weapons and tools made. Lots of wars. The time of the Ulster Cycle and Irish myths and legends.



The Early Christian Period (1600 to 800 y.a.)

Christianity arrived in Ireland. Some people began to read and write books. The church was powerful and owned land. Viking raids took place early in this period.



Medieval Period (800 to 450 y.a.)

Lots of fighting over land. Castles and churches built out of stone so they don't burn down. Towns are built for people to be safe. The Normans arrive.



Post-Medieval Period (450 to 100 y.a.)

After the Jacobite war things are more peaceful. Healthcare and drainage are better, people live longer.



The Space Age (52 y.a.)

Rockets and satellites go into space, man lands on the Moon, robots are sent to Mars.



The Modern Period (Now!)

You, sitting down and learning about archaeology in County Down.

Produced by